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Lewis, James Hamilton

A gratifying change of front

[Washington]

[1919]

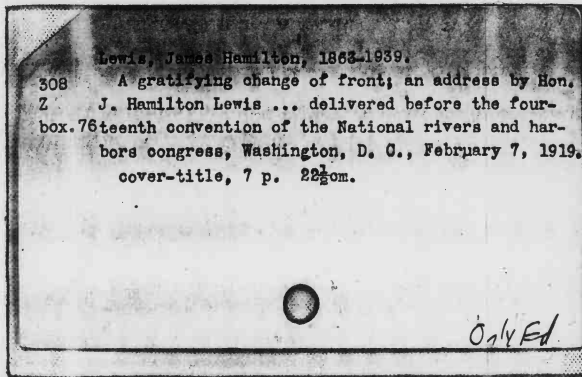
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A Gratifying Change of Front

AN ADDRESS

BY

HON. J. HAMILTON LEWIS
U. S. Senator from Illinois

Delivered before the Fourteenth Convention of the
National Rivers and Harbors Congress
Washington, D. C., February 7, 1919

14 April, 1920 - CRW

A GRATIFYING CHANGE OF FRONT

AN ADDRESS

BY

Hon. J. Hamilton Lewis

U. S. Senator from Illinois

Mr. President and Gentlemen of the Convention:

My purpose in imposing myself upon you at this moment—and for but a moment—is to bring to the attention of you, Mr. Chairman, and of you gentlemen, delegates to this Convention, what an interesting confirmation you have had from the Director-General, in his address to you this morning, of all the things for which you have been fighting ever since you organized this Association.

It has been my pleasure, gentlemen, to follow the lead of your distinguished Chairman, whose activity and industry in behalf of the improvement of waterways has been his constant theme and endless toil, both in the House of Representatives as well as in the United States Senate. Each time that we have brought forth undertakings on the floor of the Senate or in the House, there has ever been discovered a constant opposition by certain railroad agencies in the United States, blinded to their own interest and dulled in their sense of the public welfare, who have intercepted sometimes, obstructed wherever possible, and misrepresented all the time, the purposes for which you gentlemen were working.

Now, when a change has come and there is no longer any reason for certain railroad masters to misrepresent the work you undertook, you have from the mouth of a distinguished railroad official who for twenty years has been connected confidentially with the largest railroad system of America—from whom, apart from the fact that he is now an officer of the Government, you have the confession that, had there been the thing done in the last ten or twenty years for which you have been struggling, none of these troubles of the railroads which now they seek to get rid of would ever have arisen (Applause); and you have the very frank statement from the Director-General that the real remedy for the obstruction

to railroad development and the removal of the congestion in railroad shipments is to adopt the plan of the development of the inland waterways, by which these waterways may be made feeders for the railroads which cross the country from sea to sea.

Gentlemen, it is only fair to yourselves to now recall the fact that in several different instances our transcontinental railroads have denied that your work would either produce that result, or could do so; and their obstruction for all appropriations sought from Congress was a discouragement of all your labors in the past, and was based always upon the claim that the development of these waterways would produce no such result, but on the contrary would work an expenditure without result, and would create an improvement that could give you no relief and would only lay a burden upon the taxpayer without justification.

I arose at this particular second to take advantage of the distinguished Chairman's privilege and kind opportunity, and that you might not forget the speech now made you by the Director-General, who, when divorced from any personal devotion to the private interests of certain railroads, and now free to represent the public welfare of his country, confesses to you that all the things which these your obstructors heretofore professed as their reason for opposing you had no foundation in truth, and that the things which you have stated in the past as a justification for your existence are the only things that excuse your course and justify your action (Applause).

Now I have an observation which I beseech you to allow me to be bold enough to intrude. I never did see any reason for the obstruction of the development of the waterways and I have great confidence that the railroads themselves now realize the mistake in the condition which they have heretofore created; but, gentlemen of this convention, I have often in public life, and from my interest in my very dry state that I have the honor to represent with my colleague in the Senate, I have often been an advocate of these improvements for the public welfare, and I have from time to time presented reports on the effects of this inland waterway development in European countries, as Mr. Thompson, who sits here, one

of your officials, is aware. I had often observed the operation of these different waterways in the different countries of the world, insofar as their effect upon commerce was concerned; but it fell to my lot in the last few months to go to France while the War was in progress, on an insignificant mission put into my hands for discharge, which enabled me at the end to join my regiment, the regiment with which I had served in the Spanish-American War. This regiment was upon the front in France and served in aid of the British on one front, and in aid of the French on another.

Going to the British front as well as to the French front, I had opportunity to observe the operation of the small waterways through France, as to the measure in which they contributed as a war agency. This much you must know; that there is not a man in France who would not now tell you that, if it had not been for the waterway developments through France, the barges and the different instrumentalities of commerce which were utilized to carry supplies and men from point to point, there would have been no way for France to amass its army and its supplies upon the front, so as to meet Germany with a consolidated force and defeat her attempt to overcome and subject the French country. It was the use of the waterways, gentlemen of the convention, the use to which they were put, the use for which they were available in the transportation of supplies, of munitions, of food, of men, in different sections of France, that enabled the consolidation and concentration of the forces of defense, your soldiers, your sons, your children, in connection with those of France and her friends. That was the agency that brought quickness of action and that finally produced the result of action at the consolidated points which brought forth victory.

And again, I must call to your attention that, had the same thing transpired in the United States, had the request which you have been making for twenty years, based upon your honest claim for commercial development of your land and for no private benefit to any private enterprise, had it been hearkened to, had the labors of such men as your distinguished Chairman and his aides been yielded to and your necessities clearly conceived, our country would have moved on to the development of these waterways; and, gentlemen

of this convention, there would not have been the congestion of soldiers huddled up at intersecting points of this country, held on sidetracks waiting for days and days for lack of accommodations and for supplies. These could have been carried with the aid of your waterways to different sectional and junctional points on the railroad, and would rapidly have been concentrated on the Atlantic Coast, and the supplies necessary to their welfare would have been carried, and your soldiers would have reached the Coast and been enabled to embark upon vessels and be landed abroad from sixty to ninety days ahead of the quickest time they were able; but by virtue of the shortsightedness, the blind policy, the unfair and unjustifiable course on the part of those who obstructed you in the past, you were denied a quick opportunity to serve the nation.

Now there is one remaining thought that I beg to press upon you strongly, namely, that you add to your advocacy of commercial benefits that other thought, the defense against the invader.

The time is going to come in our progress, whether it be through a grievance or some commercial rivalry, when there will be antagonism to us. We cannot expand and grow and avoid these same obstructive problems which confront and attack every other country which expands and grows. The only way that our land will be able to avoid opposing enemies who advance toward it will be to do so with success at its coasts. If we shall be so shortsighted in our policy that we shall wait until the enemy's troops shall land and move upon our country, in after days, upon the theory that we can meet their invasion at the centers, there will be nothing to arrest the ills that will follow in their trail, the destruction and the consequent horrors.

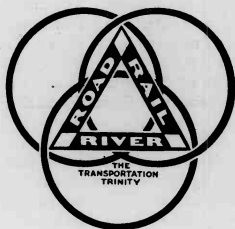
You must develop your inland waterways, and this Government must proceed now to do so, not only for the commercial uses of its citizens, but as a necessary agency of its national defense, and as a channel through which all forms of civilization, all methods of convenience, may be accommodated and hastened, so that your people can get to the coast through the development of your inland waterways as well as by their connection with your railroads, and that these shall

ever be open and accessible to you, in order that you may anticipate those days which are ahead of us, however we might dream and wish and pray to avoid them. Therefore, may I not suggest to you that, in addition to the splendid argument which you have heretofore made, which this morning was vindicated by the only source that ever has been successful in its opposition, you add thereto the essential national defense of your land, and profit by the example you have seen in France, point to it, and do it graciously as vindicating your judgment.

Gentlemen, I think you now have no reason to shrink in the future from the constant effort you have made in the past, but you have greater hope than you ever had before. There will be no great pork-barrel or waste or extravagance, or misrepresentation of your undertakings. You are now to be heard upon the merits of your enterprise. I am sure that Congress will quickly be found now coming to the relief of your prayer and giving you the justice you ask. Therefore, let your text be without regard to all the criticisms around you, founded in the excellent philosophy of Oliver Wendell Holmes, when he said:

"True to your colors, though clouds may grow dark,
Go trim your broad sails as before;
And stand by the rudder that governs your bark,
Nor ask how you look from the shore."

I thank you. (Applause.)



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